WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. In a network environment having a plurality of users each having a network-enabled calendar, the improvement comprising:

    a computer-implemented hook-up assistant (HUA) capable of

        determining an appropriate time when at least two people will be available to participate in an event or activity;

        scheduling said event or activity at said appropriate time on respective calendars of said at least two people; and

        initiating said event or activity substantially at said appropriate time.

2. The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

    said HUA comprises preferences and constraints of one of said at least two people; and wherein

    said appropriate time is determined consistent with said preferences and constraints.

3. The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

    said HUA comprises

        privileges to access and alter said respective calendars of said at least two people, and

        means for accessing and altering said respective calendars of said at least two people according to said privileges.

4. The improvement according to claim 1, further comprising:

    means for activating said HUA in response to a request from one of said at least two people.

1   5.   The improvement according to claim 4, wherein

2   said means for activating further comprises

3   means for interacting with said one of said at least two people; and

4   means for proposing said event or activity based on inputs obtained during

5   said interaction.

1   6.   The improvement according to claim 4, wherein

2   said means for activating further comprises

3   means for interacting with said one of said at least two people to solicit yes or

4   no answers; and

5   means for proposing said event or activity based on said answers.

1   7.   The improvement according to claim 1, further comprising:

2   means for activating said HUA in response to a request referring to a previous event

3   or activity with desired changes thereto.

1   8.   The improvement according to claim 4 or 7, wherein

2   said request is in a form of spoken or manually entered natural language, in a form of

3   a computer language, or in a form of an electronic signal.

1   9.   The improvement according to claim 1, further comprising:

2   automatically activating said HUA in response to an incomplete telephone call made

3   by a first of said at least two people to a second of said at least two people.

1   10.   The improvement according to claim 9, wherein

2   said incomplete telephone call is indicated by a busy signal, an answering machine, a

3   voicemail service, a computerized agent, a human assistant, a receptionist, a secretary, an

4   inanimate entity, or an animate entity other than said second of said at least two people.

1   11.   The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

2   said HUA comprises means for exchanging data related to said respective calendars

3   essentially regardless of physical and virtual boundaries that include distance, language,

4   platforms, operating systems, and network protocols.

1   12.   The improvement according to claim 11, wherein

2   said means for exchanging data is capable of encoding a cross-domain structured

3   syntax language including hypertext markup language (HTML), eXtensible HTML

4   (XHTML), eXtensible markup language (XML), XML document type definition (DTD), and

5   XML schema.

1   13.   The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

2   said HUA comprises means for assuring said at least two people be able to participate

3   in said event or activity at said appropriate time.

1   14.   The improvement according to claim 13, wherein

2   said means for assuring comprises

3   means for determining whether said at least two people will have, at said

4   appropriate time, access to suitable communication means that will be available for

5   use in said event or activity; and

6   means for reminding said at least two people about said event or activity.

1   15.   The improvement according to claim 14, wherein

2   said suitable communication means include wired and wireless communication

3   devices, resources, web-based services, cellular phones, telephones, video phones, Internet-

4   enabled phones, Internet-enabled input devices, instant messaging, virtual meeting places,

5   online chat rooms, online games, Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), MUD Object Oriented sites

6   (MOOs), personal digital assistant (PDA), and World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

7   compliant multimodal interaction means.

16.   The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

        said event or activity is a phone conversation, a business meeting, a family gathering,

or a social engagement.

17.   The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

        said HUA comprises means for securing reservations necessary to realize said event

or activity for said at least two people.

18.   The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

        said event or activity requires admission tickets, tokens, or permits; and wherein

        said HUA comprises means for purchasing said admission tickets, tokens, or permits

for said at least two people to attend said event or activity.

19.   The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

        said event or activity requires invitations; and wherein

        said HUA comprises means for obtaining invitations for said at least two people to

attend said event or activity.

20.   The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

        said appropriate time or said event or activity is found infeasible or otherwise

undesirable,

        said HUA comprises means for proposing at least one alternative.

21.   The improvement according to claim 1, wherein

        said HUA is capable of proposing changes in prior commitments on said respective

calendars when a new request can only be desirably satisfied by impinging on said prior

commitments.

22.   The improvement according to claim 21, wherein

        said HUA is capable of altering said prior commitments in accordance with proper

privileges predetermined or obtained in real time.

1   23.   The improvement according to claim 21 or 22, wherein

2   said HUA is enabled to determine independently how said prior commitments can be

3   altered; and wherein

4   said HUA automatically alters said prior commitments on said respective calendars to

5   satisfy said new request and promptly notifies those affected by said alteration.

1   24.   The improvement according to claim 23, wherein

2   said alteration is selected from the group consisting of rescheduling said prior

3   commitments, replacing said prior commitments with alternatives, and a combination

4   thereof.

1   25.   The improvement according to claim 1, further comprising:

2   means for activating said HUA, or invoking one or more functions thereof, in

3   response to a triggering mechanism selected from the group consisting of a tone, a button, a

4   key, a sound, a spoken word, a sequence of tones, a sequence of buttons, a sequence of keys,

5   a sequence of sounds, a sequence of spoken words, and a combination thereof.

1   26.   The improvement according to claim 25, wherein

2   said HUA automatically contacts or automatically schedules to contact a person, an

3   agent of said person, or a HUA of said person to schedule a hook-up event to bring its user

4   and said person together.

1   27.   The improvement according to claim 26, wherein

2   said contact is realized by phone, text message, voice message, or email.

1   28.   The improvement according to claim 26, wherein

2   said schedules to contact is effected periodically until a certain criterion is satisfied.

29.   The improvement according to claim 1, further comprising:

         a computer product for implementing said HUA, the computer product comprising a

computer readable medium carrying computer-executable instructions implementing a

plurality of functions of said HUA.

30.   The improvement according to claim 29, wherein

         said computer product is embodied in a phone, a stand-alone network-enabled device,

a client, a server, or a combination thereof.

31.   The improvement according to claim 29, wherein

         said computer product is implemented as part of an instant messaging system.

32.   In a distributed network environment having a plurality of users each of which may or

may not be assisted by an agent, the improvement comprising:

         a computer-implemented hook-up assistant (HUA) capable of

                 receiving and accepting a plurality of hook-up requests;

                 scheduling a plurality of events to effect and fulfill each of said plurality of

hook-up requests, wherein said scheduling include, for a desired event,

                         determining an appropriate time for all parties involved to attend said desired

                 event; and

                         tentatively committing said all parties involved by indicating said desired

         event at said appropriate time on calendars of said all parties involved.

33.   The improvement according to claim 32, wherein

         each of said plurality of hook-up requests is specified in terms of a series of people or

groups with whom interactions are separately desired.

34.   The improvement according to claim 32, wherein

         the sequence of said interactions correlates with the order of said series.

1   35.   The improvement according to claim 32, wherein

2   said HUA comprises means for enabling a requesting user to minimize resources,

3   including time and expenses, associated with participating in all scheduled events on said

4   user's calendar.

1   36.   The improvement according to claim 32, wherein

2   said HUA comprises

3   means for maintaining a federated calendar;

4   means for accessing and retrieving calendar data from a plurality of sources in

5   said distributed network environment; and

6   means for processing said calendar data to generate integrated views of said

7   federated calendar.

1   37.   The improvement according to claim 36, wherein

2   said HUA further comprises

3   means for storing privileges, constraints, and preferences, wherein

4   said accessing and retrieving calendar data is effected in accordance with said

5   privileges, constraints, and preferences.

1   38.   The improvement according to claim 36, wherein

2   said federated calendar contains

3   information about devices, resources, services, and at least one of said

4   plurality of users.

1   39.   The improvement according to claim 32, wherein

2   said HUA is capable of

3   updating said calendars of said all parties involved, thereby committing said

4   all parties involved to attend said desired event at said appropriate time.

1   40.   The improvement according to claim 32, wherein

2   said HUA comprises means for exchanging calendar information across physical and

3   virtual boundaries that include distance, language, platforms, operating systems, and network

4   protocols.

1   41.   The improvement according to claim 40, wherein

2   said HUA further comprises means for encoding said calendar information written in

3   a cross-domain structured syntax language including hypertext markup language (HTML),

4   eXtensible HTML (XHTML), eXtensible markup language (XML), XML document type

5   definition (DTD), and XML schema.

1   42.   The improvement according to claim 32, wherein

2   said HUA is capable of proposing at least one alternative when said appropriate time

3   or said desired event is found infeasible, inapplicable, or otherwise undesirable.

1   43.   The improvement according to claim 32, wherein

2   said HUA is capable of proposing changes in prior commitments on said calendars of

3   said all parties involved when a new request can only be desirably satisfied by impinging on

4   said prior commitments.

1   44.   The improvement according to claim 43, wherein

2   said HUA is capable of altering said prior commitments in accordance with proper

3   privileges predetermined or obtained in real time.

1   45.   The improvement according to claim 43 or 44, wherein

2   said HUA is enabled to determine independently how said prior commitments can be

3   altered; and wherein

4   said HUA automatically alters said prior commitments on affected calendars to

5   satisfy said new request and promptly notifies those affected by said alteration.

1 46.   The improvement according to claim 45, wherein

2   said alteration is selected from the group consisting of rescheduling said prior

3 commitments, replacing said prior commitments with alternatives, and a combination

4 thereof.

1 47.   The improvement according to claim 32, further comprising:

2   a computer product for implementing said HUA, the computer product comprising a

3 computer-readable medium carrying computer-executable instructions implementing a

4 plurality of functions of said HUA.

1 48.   The improvement according to claim 47, wherein

2   said computer product is embodied in a stand-alone network-enabled device, a client,

3 a server, or a combination thereof.

1 49.   The improvement according to claim 47, wherein

2   said computer product is implemented as part of an instant messaging system.